

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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REP. BOB KUZMAN'S STATEHOUSE REPORT

INDIANAPOLIS – At the midway point of the 2005 session of the Indiana General Assembly, the time has come to take stock of what has happened so far this year.

Tuesday (March 1) was the final day for House members to complete work on legislation that started in that chamber. Over the first two months of the session, representatives ended up approving 117 House bills and a joint resolution, sending these measures on to the Senate for action. Remember that 859 House bills and 18 House joint resolutions were filed for consideration at the start of this year.

Looking back at the first half of the 2005 session, I believe it has been successful, both in terms of accomplishments and in blocking a number of bills that would have had a negative impact on many Hoosiers.

Of course, a person cannot talk about a long session without first discussing the biennial state budget contained in House Bill 1001. As I have mentioned on many occasions, I have serious problems with the budget that passed the House – it will cut funding for most school corporations in Indiana, it will lead to property tax increases, and it woefully underfunds federally mandated health care programs for the elderly and disabled. Passing a budget is the one thing we must do in this session, and I am very hopeful that the Indiana Senate will make changes to improve House Bill 1001.

I believe there are other highlights from the first half of the session.

House Bill 1003 speeds up the creation of the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, which will play a major role in our state's efforts to attract and retain jobs. House Bill 1083 extends the life of the earned income tax credit that provides tax relief to working Hoosiers who need it the most. House Bill 1008 creates a state Department of Agriculture that will help create programs to benefit farmers and rural communities. House Bill 1729 provides a means to secure funding that will help us proceed with critical state and local road projects, and create thousands of jobs.

These are all worthwhile accomplishments that benefit the lives of many people across the state. They passed due to strong bipartisan cooperation, something which was noticeably absent in the House during the last few days before the March 1 deadline.

After eight weeks in which House members handled 117 bills, representatives were asked to debate and vote on more than 130 bills on one day, March 1. If we were to spend only 15 minutes on each bill, it would take 33 hours to consider everything on the calendar.

In addition, a number of the bills contained provisions that disturbed many lawmakers because they took away rights valued by Hoosiers. I want to talk about two of these measures that have upset a number of people.

House Bill 1002 would have formally created the post of inspector general, an official appointed by the governor to look into cases of fraud and corruption in government. I agree with the idea of this position, because we should act quickly to respond when there are reports of wrongdoing so that the people can trust their elected officials.

However, Gov. Daniels' proposal lacks the checks and balances found in those states that have an inspector general to ferret out wrongdoing. The inspector general should be independent of the governor's office in order to avoid charges of political influence. The inspector general then could investigate improprieties at all levels of government, including the

governor's office.

The inspector general position outlined in House Bill 1002 would have the ability to go into any county in Indiana and begin criminal proceedings and take over cases. This inspector general would be able to override the authority of elected county prosecutors, change venues for those he prosecutes, issue subpoenas and empanel grand juries.

In short, this inspector general appointed by the governor would have greater powers than the Indiana Attorney General and your local county prosecutor, both of whom are elected by voters. The only accountability an inspector general would have would be to the governor who made the appointment.

By giving the governor this authority, we are running the risk of breaching the separation of powers contained within the Indiana Constitution. Other states have inspector generals, but none with the powers that would have been granted under House Bill 1002.

I would support having an inspector general who investigates cases of fraud and corruption, then turns the information over to local prosecutors to handle the cases.

House Bill 1439 also sounds deceptively simple. It requires voters to provide a photo ID before being allowed to vote on Election Day. In reality, this proposal is designed to intimidate voters, particularly senior citizens, minorities and people on lower incomes.

With the type of voter identification system contained in House Bill 1439 in place, I believe that Election Days in Indiana will be similar to what people in Ohio had to endure last November: waiting for hours to cast a vote. In Iraq, a person simply had to put his or her finger in a bowl of ink in order to vote. Do we really think that we should place more restrictions on voters than they do in Iraq?

I supported an effort that would have enabled voters to offer other pieces of identification – such as utility bills, vehicle registration or Social Security cards – in order to vote. Those efforts were defeated.

Of course there are disappointments in seeing proposals I strongly support not make it through the deadline, but it is also important to remember that there are two months remaining in the 2005 session. Bill numbers might be dead, but the concepts contained in these bills remain alive. There is still time to debate the merits of these proposals, correct their flaws and pass them into law before the end of this session. I am ready to work toward that goal.

With work on House bills now complete, we turn our attention to legislation that has come to us from the Indiana Senate. In next week's Report, I will take an advance look at some Senate bills we will consider in the weeks ahead.

If you want to talk to me about anything taking place at the Indiana General Assembly, please call me on the toll-free Statehouse telephone number of 1-800-382-9842, e-mail me through my Internet Web site at www.IN.gov/H19 or write to me in care of the Indiana House of Representatives, 200 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.

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